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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 002442

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DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/26/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PM](#)

SUBJECT: FM LEWIS ON TORRIJOS TRAVEL, PARTY FUTURE, COURT
REFORMS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR WILLIAM EATON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)
PRESIDENT TORRIJOS TO SEEK MEETING WITH PRESIDENT BUSH

11. (C) President Torrijos plans to visit the United States in February and may seek an appointment with President Bush, Foreign Minister Samuel Lewis Navarro told the Ambassador December 27. The most likely day for the meeting request with President Bush is February 26, the same day Torrijos is scheduled to meet with Defense Secretary Gates, said Lewis. Torrijos also plans to visit College Station on February 28.
TORRIJOS TRIP TO CUBA

12. (C) Lewis indicated that President Torrijos planned to travel to Cuba January 4-6, where has requested meetings with both Fidel and Raul Castro. Torrijos will be accompanying his daughter to Cuba for physical therapy.
LEWIS ON FUTURE OF PRD AND HIMSELF

13. (C) Current Housing Minister Balbina Herrera will run for president of the ruling Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD) in the 2007 internal party elections, said Lewis. Herrera's bid for party president is a move to "edge out" and lessen the influence of former Panamanian President Perez Balladares and current Panama City mayor Juan Carlos Navarro in the run-up to the 2009 presidential elections, he said. In particular, Lewis appeared hopeful that Herrera's position as PRD president would avoid the appearance of Navarro as heir apparent for the presidential election. Lewis said they would have to "play this carefully" as Herrera's plans are not yet public knowledge.

14. (C) Lewis told the Ambassador he may well step down as Foreign Minister (while still maintaining the first vice president position), "but not imminently." He said it is still too early and the timing is not right for him to step down now. (Comment: Although Lewis did not mention any specific timeframe, he gave subtle indications that it would be within the next six months, possibly after the internal party elections. End Comment.)
REFORMS

15. (C) Lewis said plans are to move ahead with the creation of the Sala V (an added group of three Supreme Court justices). The GOP plans to convene an extraordinary session of the National Assembly in January to approve the formation of the Sala V and hopes to start appointing additional justices in January or February, added Lewis. He said this would help change the balance of power in the notoriously corrupt Supreme Court by bringing in respected apolitical figures similar to those appointed previously appointed by

Torrijos. He also mentioned ongoing attempts to reform the Judicial Technical Police (PTJ). The PTJ is "rotten to the core," said Lewis. He acknowledged the courts' opposition to bringing the PTJ under control of the Executive, but said reform was necessary.

Eaton